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ABSTRACT

The literature on first-year teachers identifies the difficulties of this transition period and supports the need for first-year teacher-induction programs. Little attention, however, has been paid to the principal's role in the induction of beginning teachers. This paper presents findings of a study that examined the perceptions of principals and beginning teachers regarding the problems, role expectations, and assistance that pertain to the first year of teaching. Data were derived from a survey of 75 Nebraska elementary and secondary teachers who were beginning their second year of teaching in both public and nonpublic schools. The response rate was 65 percent (n=49). An additional nine teachers were interviewed. A survey of 75 Nebraska principals from elementary and high schools and from public and nonpublic schools elicited a 75 percent response rate (n=56). Beginning teachers reported that their principals' interaction and guidance were important to them. Both groups ranked classroom management and discipline as the number-one problem. Teachers reported the need for a year-long induction program that included mentoring. Ninety-four percent of the principals said that they assigned mentors; however, much variance existed in the selection, assignment, and training of mentors. It is suggested that orientation programs be tailored to the school context and teachers' unique needs. (Contains 23 references.) (LMI)

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Beginning Teacher Induction Programs

The first year of teaching is challenging and frustrating. Often the enthusiasm and dreams of the beginning teacher give way to disillusionment and despair (Ryan, 1986; Veenman, 1984). The seemingly insurmountable problems prompt many new teachers to abandon the profession (Brock, 1988; Ryan, 1979; Zumwalt, 1984).

The literature on first-year teachers identifies the difficulties of this transition period and supports the need for first-year teacher induction programs (Brock, 1988,1990). However, little attention has been paid to the principal's role in the induction of beginning teachers. Although principals are called on to be instructional leaders, the research provides little information for principals to use in meeting the challenges of beginning teachers.

Review of the Literature

First-year teachers represent different age groups, backgrounds, and experiences. For many first-year teachers, the career transition is paralleled by personal transitions. After seventeen years as students the new graduates enter the world of adult responsibilities (Heck & Williams, 1984). This means a life-style transformation, changing places of residence and becoming financially independent. Other first-year teachers enter teaching after years in another occupation or return to teaching after raising a family.

The first year of teaching requires simultaneous socialization into the teaching profession and into a specific school environment (Ryan et al, 1980). New teachers join faculties in which friendships and social groups are already formed (Ryan, 1986). The cultural norms and shared history of the school are unknown to them (Brock & Grady, 1994; Cole, 1991; Corcoran, 1981; Hanson, 1996; Sergiovanni, 1995). The general teaching methods that they learned in college need to be adapted to the specific needs of the school setting (Ryan, 1986). Meanwhile, the administration and parents expect demonstrations of expertise comparable to a seasoned veteran (Howey and Bents, 1979).

First-year teachers report feeling overwhelmed and isolated (Camp, 1991; Liberman and Miller, 1994). They feel inadequate as teachers and are unaware that others experience similar problems (Ryan, 1986; Veenman, 1984). Without support and guidance, beginners often grasp the first strategies that work and cling to them throughout their careers. Little professional growth occurs (Howey & Bents, 1979; Langana, 1970; Shulman & Colbert, 1988; Zumwalt, 1984). Other beginners become disillusioned and quit teaching after the first year (Glickman, 1995; Gordon, 1991).

Purpose of the study

Principals play a key role in inducting beginning teachers into their schools as well as into the teaching profession (Hughes, 1994; Lieberman & Miller, 1984; Smith & Andrews, 1989). Yet little

information is provided to assist them in meeting the challenges of working with beginning teachers. In order to provide support and guidance, principals need to understand the problems and induction needs of beginning teachers, plus the significance of the principals' role (Chester, 1992; Lee, 1994; Sergiovanni, 1996).

The purpose for conducting this study was to examine the perceptions of principals and beginning teachers regarding the problems, role expectations, and assistance that pertain to the first year of teaching. The following questions guided the study: What differences exist between reports of beginning teachers and principals regarding the problems that first-year teachers experience? What role expectations do beginning teachers and principals have for each other? What differences exist between the kinds of assistance that beginning teachers want and the kinds of assistance that principals provide?

Design of the study

During the first phase of the study, information was gathered from teachers who were beginning their second year of teaching. Surveys were mailed to a random sample of seventy-five second-year elementary and high school teachers from public and non-public schools in Nebraska. Surveys were returned by forty-nine (65%) of the teachers. An additional nine teachers were interviewed. Respondents described their expectations for assistance from the principal, problems that they had encountered during their first

year, and outlined components that they thought should be included in a first-year induction program.

During the second phase of the study, information was gathered from principals. Surveys were mailed to a random sample of 75 elementary and high school principals from public and non-public schools in Nebraska. Surveys were returned by fifty-six (75%) of the principals. Respondents reported their expectations for beginning teachers, the problems that they had experienced with beginning teachers, and methods that they used to provide assistance during the first year.

Results of the study

What do principals and beginning teachers expect of each other? Principals reported that they expected their first-year teachers to demonstrate the following proficiencies: a professional attitude, adequate knowledge of subject areas, good classroom management skills, excellent communication skills, a belief that every child can learn, and a desire to help students succeed. One principal commented, "every effort must be made to help all students succeed." Another said, "I expect them to work on a professional level in all respects. Obviously they'll make mistakes, but I encourage them to take risks in the classroom by attempting new approaches and strategies. I also expect them to be team players and find their roles as staff members." Principals in non-public schools added that they expected beginning teachers to be "spiritually sound and committed to the ministry of their faith."

Beginning teachers also reported expectations for principals. They reported that the principal is the most important person in the school. The principal determines the school's culture, establishes the rules and expectations, and is responsible for evaluating them. As expressed in the following comments, beginning teachers want guidance from the principals.

"The most difficult part of the first year was understanding the expectations of the principal. I didn't know what to expect. What was the role of the principal and how was I to relate? At the beginning all I saw the principal do was act as a welcomer. Here's the school. Good luck. I didn't know what his role was, his expectations for me, and how I could expect him to react. I wanted to know his philosophy, expectations for me, his values for education, students, and expectations for quality teaching. I was left on my own to develop a style of teaching and classroom management. I hoped that it was one that he approved of."

"I would like affirmation from my principal that I am doing things OK. If I'm not, then I want to hear about it so I can address and correct the situation. At the end of the year an evaluation by the principal would be good. But give me an opportunity to find out what I need to improve and do that before evaluating me."

"All beginning teachers should meet monthly with the principal. The topics should cover the culture and traditions of the school, the expectations, regular events, and what to expect."

"The principal should express the expectations he has for students in the school. I needed to know about the parameters of the grading system. I needed to know expectations for lesson plans."

"Principals need to make sure that beginning teachers have a lightened load so we can focus on our classroom organization and preparation. The load for many first year teachers is overwhelming."

"I would like to meet one-on-one with a principal during the first weeks of school so I can ask questions."

"I like the high visibility of my principal. He stops in my room. If he sees a problem he can let me know right away. I like having feedback available like that."

"I wish that my principal would have introduced me to the rest of the staff so I know who everyone was and what they did...the office and cafeteria staff."

"I want to know what my principal considers good teaching and how my performance measures up."

"The principal is the most important person in the school. I would like him to visit my classes and give me feedback."

"The administration and faculty have been here for many years. Many of the traditions and ways of doing things were never told to me or fully explained. I would like the principal to share the school's traditions with me."

These comments indicate how important the principals' interaction and guidance is to beginning teachers. The expectations of the beginning teachers illustrate that principals are central to the

successful socialization and first-year induction of beginning teachers. Although most of the literature on teacher induction has focused on the importance of mentors, principals are clearly key figures in the induction process.

What differences exist between the problems that beginning teachers identify and the pre-service preparation deficiencies that principals report? The problems reported by beginning teachers and principals were similar in nature and consistent with the literature on beginning teachers. The list of problems varied only in the rank order assigned to the problems (Gordon, 1990; Brock, 1988; Ryan, 1986; Shulman & Colbert, 1987).

The number one ranked problem was the same for both principals and beginning teachers. Classroom management and discipline were consistently ranked as the major problem by both principals and teachers. Other problems were similar, yet not necessarily given the same priority.

Beginning teachers reported the following rank-ordered list of the problems: classroom management and discipline, working with mainstreamed students, determining appropriate expectations for students, dealing with stress, handling angry parents, keeping up with paper work, grading/evaluating student work, handling student conflicts, pacing lessons, varying teaching methods, dealing with students of varying abilities, and feeling inadequate as a teacher.

The principals noted many of the same problems that the beginning teachers did, although most principals reported over-all

satisfaction with the preparation of beginning teachers. One principal said, "I have worked with super first-year teachers."

A few principals reported a lack of instructional skills, "They don't have well developed concepts about how to teach. They mimic the teaching of their supervising teacher." Others reported concern with beginning teachers' inability to interact well with people. [Beginning teachers] "are very good in their academic areas but sometimes lack people skills". Still others reported that beginning teachers were poorly prepared to work with students of varying ability levels. "...seem to lack a working knowledge of special education students and law requirements." A few principals commented on time management, stress, and commitment issues, [Beginning teachers] "seem surprised by the amount of time and energy required of teachers". "They're not prepared to handle the work load and stress." "One principal reported, "[Beginning teachers] tell me that there is so much to do they often feel like they're in a black hole the first year." Another said,"...the degree of time that [beginning teachers' are willing to commit to planning and preparation is often a significant factor the first year."

What differences and similarities exist between the kinds of assistance that beginning teachers want and the kinds of assistance that principals provide? Responses indicated that the main difference lies in the length and comprehensiveness of the induction program. Principals reported that they provide a Fall orientation,

mentors, and evaluations. Teachers reported a need for a year-long induction program that included mentors.

Most of the principals indicated that they offered an orientation for new faculty before school opened, assigned mentors, and spent time working individually with beginners. Principals described extensive orientations that covered teaching practices, policies, procedures, classroom management, public relations, lesson planning, conferencing, and a host of other topics. All of the principals reported doing some type of classroom observation. The amount varied widely from daily to twice a year. Most principals used both formative and summative evaluations.

Table number one presents the methods of assistance listed in the survey and the percentages of respondents who reported using each of the methods.

Table One

Methods Of Assistance Used By Principals With Beginning Teachers

Method	Percentage of principals
Fall orientation	61%
Mentor	94%
Occasional meetings during the year	11%
Year-long induction program	22%

Percentages will not equal 100% as respondents could select more than one method.

Principals who responded affirmatively to year-long induction programs reported holding several informative meetings during the year, meeting on a quarterly basis, or meeting just prior to key events during the school year. One principal described a comprehensive induction program that included informal and formal meetings, observations with pre- and post-conferences, newsletters, and mentors.

The principals reported that mentors and personal interactions with the beginning teachers were the most useful induction strategies that they used. However, much variance existed in the selection, assignment, and training of the mentors. Although a few (29%) indicated that they were part of an area or district-wide mentorship program that identified, assigned, and trained mentors, 71% of the principals indicated that they had no formal program and no training for mentors. Principals reported the following descriptors in their selection of mentors: "same grade level," "close in age, "master teachers," "similar personalities," "best teacher of adults," good listener," capable, knowledgeable, and friendly." Some assignments fell into a random category, described as, "volunteers," "random selection," or "I assign." The choices reported fit into three general categories reported in Table Two.

Table Two

Selection of mentors

Method of Selection	Percentage
Matching grade level	60%
Personal attributes	30%
Random selection	10%

Beginning teachers reported that in addition to pre-school orientations and mentors, they want a year-long assistance program. One wrote, "Don't forget that at the end of the school year we're still beginning teachers. We have never ended a school year before." The teachers suggested following up the Fall orientation with monthly meetings, possibly meeting more frequently during the first month or two. The speakers at the meetings should include the principal, veteran teachers, teachers with specialized skills, and should include the counselor, secretary, janitor, and cafeteria personnel.

Most beginning teachers reported a need for mentors as an integral part of the induction program. They reported that the mentor should be experienced, teach in the same content area, and be able to provide suggestions, discuss experiences, and just listen. Suggestions for scheduled meetings ranged from weekly to monthly. Only a few beginning teachers indicated displeasure with their mentor, noting that the mentor should be accountable for time spent and that assistance should not be based solely on the new teachers' questions.

Content areas that beginning teachers reported needing help with included the following: writing lesson plans, establishing a pace for the completion of texts and other instructional materials, establishing and implementing consistent discipline rules, evaluation scales, assessment options, record keeping policies, grading and process, modifying lessons, finding resources for students of different levels, determining expectations for mainstreamed students, and

coordinating with special education teachers. Beginning teachers in non-public schools added that they needed assistance with the religious dimensions of their teaching and school responsibilities.

Beginning teachers reported that observations by principals and mentors should be a means of providing feedback and assistance. The purpose of evaluations that principals and mentors make during the year should be for the purpose of assisting them in their professional development. Formal evaluations for contract renewal should be made only at the end of the year and only by the principal.

Conclusions

The first year of teaching is the first year of a teaching career, and should be considered as one step along a continuum of professional development (Howey and Bents, 1979). Beginning teachers are beginners all year long. They require on-going assistance throughout the first year, and possibly longer.

Beginning teachers reported that the principal is a key source of support and guidance. The principal is likely to be the person who hired or was instrumental in the decision to hire them. As the leader of the school, the principal determines the expectations for teaching and learning. The beginning teacher wants to please and receive a good evaluation from the principal. Obviously, if principals do not share their expectations or affirm the teachers' efforts, beginning teachers feel abandoned and frustrated. Although many

principals in the study recognized the significance of their role, the laments of some of the beginning teacher are reminders that this critical role is not yet recognized by all principals.

Mentors are viewed as helpful by beginning teachers and principals. However, the diversity reported in the criteria for selection and the lack of training of mentors are issues that need to be resolved. Well selected and trained mentors have the potential to provide a benefit yet unexplored.

The diversity of needs expressed by the beginning teachers in this study reflect the individuality of the teachers, the uniqueness of the specific school context, as well as needs common to most beginning teachers. Thus, orientation and induction programs need to be tailored to their unique needs (Sergiovanni, 1996; Lee, 1994; Chester, 1992). One beginning teacher summed up the obvious, but often forgotten, when she wrote, "Ask us what we need to know. Then plan the meetings to provide information and assistance that responds to those needs."

The results of this study reveal that principals recognize a need for first-year teacher assistance and are making attempts at providing some assistance. The assistance reported in this study revealed that mentorships and induction programs are largely in the infancy stage of development. More structured and comprehensive mentorships and entry-year induction programs will develop as principals observe the positive long-term effects on the

improvement of teaching and the retention of quality teachers. To that end, evaluations of structured mentorship and year-long induction programs need to be conducted.

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